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Coming and going: itinerant education and educational capital

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Abstract

The design studio is itinerant. It travels from place to place, alternating between working and wandering. Journeys are made, learnt from, forgotten, revisited. But how do you learn 'as you go'? What models, motivations and methods underpin itinerant aspects of architectural education? Models traverse the public learning of the Grand Tour, the private consumption of Architectural Tourism, mobilities of the Field-Studio. Motivations shift from Euro-centric sites deemed worthy of study to a global field of competing and contested urban futures. Emergent site practices of the late twentieth/ early twenty-first century mirror disciplinary changes over the past 50 years. Two pivot points are the Yale studio of 1968, the basis for the influential *Learning from Las Vegas*, and King and Kelleher's concept of South West as a budget airline in 1971. In 1958, the UK's first motorway, the Preston Bypass, opened; by 1969 the UK had 1000 miles built; in 2008 there are 2200 miles, costing £30m per mile (ten times the amount which the University of Cambridge has just spent on its Architecture buildings). Is a 'home and away' studio model predicated on the site and dominant content of architectural education/practice being 'home', inflected and enriched with study visits 'away', responsive enough? How might recent academic discourse in other disciplines, which has engaged with the ethics and politics of fieldwork, situated knowledges, questions of research and post-colonialism, mobilities, the privilege of tourism practices, inform Architecture's engagement with studio/field practices, the increasingly itinerant reality of architectural students, academics and practitioners? How might a model of education as a critical itinerant practice be a way of positioning and pursuing relevant and rigorous architectural knowledge and endeavour? Is a more precise understanding of the coming and going of 'educational capital' a way forward?

Keywords: tour, site, itinerant, simile

1 Coming and going: architectural education is itinerant

The design studio, a central locus of architectural education, has been criticised for being too isolated, and for over-emphasising the primacy of the individual, inadequately preparing students for skills needed for participatory practice (Nicol+Pilling [1]). The site visit/field trip can act as a corrective to this alleged weakness and becomes a place for critical transformation of aspects of architectural knowledge and practice. In developed traditions of learning-by-doing, Schön outlines “less easily nameable traditions that inform the ways in which groups of students learn from and with one another.” (Schön [2]). The studio site visit/field trip is simultaneously spatially ‘outside’ the Academy, yet also temporally ‘within’ its own parameters. It can be seen as a kind of extension which is necessary to the creative survival of the discipline, “Architecture was inside the university, but inside as an outsider.” (Wigley [3]). Students have potential to have more control over learning processes, as the social context for learning is generally weighted more towards the student/field/site than the teacher/academy. There are overlaps between field as a place to learn from and site as a place to practice (design and/or research) in/on/with. Travel and tourism practices, from the normative to the self consciously performative, contribute to how ‘learning through going’ is understood and undertaken in architectural education and urban studies. It is hard to imagine an architectural education without some degree of itinerancy.

The history of the international site visit in architectural education begins with privileged travel of the Grand Tour of Europe from the eighteenth century. This often prolonged and idealised period of three to four years was seen as a completion of education, as well as an engagement with a potential pool of clients. The motivation was to complete a body of work that would demonstrate suitability for gaining commissions as an architect back at home in the UK, gaining “a more public knowledge...a kind of academic education on tour and inside the office, without direct contact with the building trades...pupillage, travelling and painstaking archaeological investigation” (Crimson+Lubbock [4]).

Study itineraries recur and continue as a mode within twentieth century architectural education in the US and Europe, continuing an implicit nexus of value of the western historical tradition, and an emphasis on architecture as in-situ artefact. Implicit and explicit references to this mode of architectural education are found scattered through reports of twentieth century UK design studios. However the Grand Tour now usually operates as a foundational element, or is disguised as Architectural Tourism, or more marginal flâneur wanderings. Students return from Gap Year or vacation travel with speedy sketches and digital data which informally contribute to their personal development (or blogs) rather than laboured measured study and observations “likely to prove of the least Utility” with which set up a practice portfolio (Crimson+Lubbock [5]). The much expanded travel industry of the latter part of the twentieth century, and new experiences and modes of mass travel, have influenced design studios. Shifting the idea of studying valued cultural artefacts to studying more ‘common’ sites of everyday life, allowing preoccupations with

networked mobilities to be generators as well as sites of architectural possibility, enabling injections of (usually urban) junk travel fixes.

What differentiates ‘tour’ from ‘tourism’ from ‘travel fix’? Embedded notions of rites of passage and travel as discovery remain as remnant, sometimes hidden objectives of many architectural field trips. Travel over a long period of time was key to the gaining of public knowledge in the Grand Tour. Denise Scott Brown identifies two primary motivations for the relevance of travel to architects: understanding the potential field for action: ‘broadening of the terms of reference...understand the context in which they build’, and aesthetic development, ‘sharpening and refining their aesthetic sensibilities...an aesthetic jolt...opening the eye to new possibilities of beauty...reviving the creative energies’ (Pearce+Toy [6]). While these can be true of architectural education in both the eighteenth and twentieth century, the potential field for exploration/study/work is now trans-atlantic, post-colonial and global. Tour is protracted, fosters practical engagement/production, coming and going; tourism is fleeting, limited often to ‘gaze’, primarily consumes in passing; travel fixes may become a habit.

Field-Studios of the twentieth century include the seminal Venturi, Scott Brown + Izenour Yale architectural studio project of 1968-70 and The Harvard *Project on The City*, 1996-present. Both *Learning from Las Vegas* and *Project on The City* connect fieldwork research and design proposition in their methods. The former aimed to learn from contemporary urban sprawl through the documentation and analysis of the physical form of Las Vegas; “we... wondered if our brand of sightseeing research- which is entertaining, enjoyable, and enormously instructive for our own work- could not, if carefully and rigorously organised, prove enjoyable and instructive for our students as well.”(Scott Brown [7]). The latter aims to highlight a disciplinary lack of ability to describe new urban conditions, with emphasis on “evolving agents, relationships and consequences of urbanization...collective (staff + student) ‘travel and research’... in the first semester of an academic year, with “fleshing out individual inquiries taking place in the second part of the year” (Koolhaas [8]). Engagement with the topic in-situ is intensified by its short duration. A compressed going to the field informing more expansive coming to conclusion in the Academy, then disseminating in public is a now familiar conventional model of research.

2 Coming and going: architectural education is capital

Within Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of cultural, social, symbolic capital where might the ‘educational capital’ of the design studio be situated? Bourdieu accords general educational success to a range of cultural, social and symbolic behaviour outwith academic features, and sees education as a critical example of capital transfer between generations. What does that mean in terms of understanding activity, behaviour, motivations, methodology, for an architecture student, architectural educators, collective studio practice and outputs, and transfer across global networks? Coming and going in the design studio can be understood as a practice with particular logics, placing importance on the body

and practices within the social world, as architecture demands bodily experience, or imagining of experience, within the world. The architectural design studio is an agent in the flow of educational capital.

3 Coming and going: architectural education as a critical itinerant practice?

Collective environmental/ geopolitical dilemmas are drawing attention to a need to reassess education's relationship with travel. If architectural education, and the design studio as its key locus, is itinerant, and learning 'as you go' (Grand Tour) or 'through going' (Field-Studio) continue to be a creative nexus for critical transformations of architectural knowledge, skills and practice responsive to a globalised situation, what is an appropriate future model? The 1958 Oxford Conference, in seeking to consolidate and make consistent UK architectural education, emphasised a predominant retreat into the Academy, the Universities/Colleges, with excursions into 'live' projects, the field, the building site' in preparation for practice. How might the design studio, an agent in the flow of educational capital, enact a critical and relevant itinerant practice fifty years on? The implicit confusion, lack of direction and ambiguity in 'coming *or* going' may alternatively be read as a basis for a self-conscious practice of 'coming *and* going'. Reviving slower practices of travel, where methods of looking and doing include both fleeting gaze-recording and extended in-situ material study; reassessing hidden curricula and agendas of studio travel where motivations are consciously critiqued, may promote re-engagement with what/where the sites of knowledge and value in architecture are. Reconceptualising the design studio as critically itinerant; as probe, as prosthetic, as home, as host/guest, as script, as project, as archive, as worker and wanderer.

[1] Nicol,D & Pilling,S *Changing Architectural Education. Towards a new professionalism*. London & New York, E&FNSpon, p7 quoting Dana Cuff, 2000

[2] Schön, D *The Design Studio: An Exploration of its Traditions and Potentials* London, RIBA Publications Ltd for RIBA Building Industry Trust, 1985

[3] Wigley,M 'Prosthetic Theory: The Disciplining of Architecture', *Assemblage* 15 p6-29, Aug 1991

[4] Crinson, M and Lubbock, J *Architecture, Art or profession? Three hundred years of Architectural Education in Britain* Manchester University Press, p24,40, 1994

[5] *ibid.* p24, quoting pamphlet 'An Essay on the Qualifications and Duties of an Architect', 1773

[6] Pearce,M & Toy,M *The Education of Architects*, London, Academy Editions, p127, 1995

[7] Scott Brown,D 'On Formal Analysis as Design Research, *JAE*, Vol 32, No4 Search/Research, p8, May 1979.

[8] <http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/people/faculty/koolhaas/research.html>.